Women and Catharism

WOMEN AND CATHARISM

Participation of women in sustaining and spreading the dualist heresy known as Catharism in Languedoc in the first half of the thirteenth century was greater than the passive role generally assigned to them in medieval society. The records of the Inquisition (which survive in France from the 1230s) bear witness to this, for these carefully recorded depositions and sentences contain many examples of women who became perfectae, or ministers of the Cathar faith, and many more who were credentes, the believers of the faith who provided economic support and shelter for the 'perfect'. So commonplace was the participation of women in Cathar society that there is a case of a female spy having been used by the Inquisition. In the mid-1230s Marquèse, the wife of Bertrand de Prouille, three times sent information to a Master Raoul of Narbonne (an official of the Inquisition) concerning gatherings of heretics to which she was freely admitted, for she came from a family of heretics. On each occasion Master Raoul came in response to her information, but she was not apparently a very efficient spy - since he caught only one heretic. Nevertheless, he thought it worthwhile to supply Marquèse with money ostensibly to help the heretics, for whom she bought food.[1] This method could hardly have been employed had not the Cathars accepted women as members of the sect and placed confidence in female supporters. The aim of this essay is twofold: first, to describe the role of women in Catharism during the first half of the thirteenth century by means of examples taken largely from inquisitorial records (in particular from the Collection Doat in the Bibliothèque Nationale), and secondly, to try to offer some explanation for this role which contrasts so markedly with the usual 'right order' of things in medieval society.

In essentials the Cathar Church was divided into two classes: the perfecti and the credentes. The perfecti were a small minority who had received the consolamentum in a special ceremony, vowing to live lives of absolute purity, pacific, chaste, without property, eating and drinking only what was strictly prescribed. Their lives were devoted to preaching, conversion and contemplation. The credentes did not take vows of this kind, but outwardly at least, integrated with the society around them, participating in economic life, marrying and bringing up families and engaging in warfare when the occasion arose. Generally they received the consolamentum from the perfecti when on the point of death.

In the Catholic Church the ministry was of course exclusively male. No such distinction was made among the Cathars. Women became perfectae, indeed were sometimes brought up with this specific purpose in mind, rather as Catholic children were sometimes vowed to the Church from an early age.

A striking example of this kind is recorded in the deposition of Arnaude de Lamothe, from Montauban, who appeared before the Inquisitor Friar Ferrier in 1244. She recalled that in 1209 (when she was still a girl) she and her sister Péronne had been handed over by their mother, who was a believer, to heretics, who took them to the house of a perfecta called Poncia at Villemur. This was a kind of convent for female heretics. Here they stayed for about four months until they were taken to the house of Raymond Aymeric, the deacon of the heretics at Villemur. In the presence of a large gathering of Cathars they received the consolamentum, thus entering the ranks of the perfect. Austorgue, the mother, had evidently selected these two girls to become perfectae from her seven children mentioned in the deposition. Bernard de Lamothe, who was probably an older brother, eventually became the Cathar bishop of Toulouse, and the other four (two girls and two boys) were believers in the sect.

Arnaude and Péronne lived at Poncia's house for another year after 'ordination' until the arrival of the Albigensian Crusade in the vicinity forced them and their companions to flee. This marked the beginning of a life spent 'on the run', during which Péronne died, and which finally ended with the arrest of Arnaude by the Inquisition. The sisters were taken from house to house and farm to farm, or they lived in cabins or huts built in the woods, sometimes staying overnight or for a few days, at other times remaining for as long as a year (and on one occasion for three years) when they lived in a cattle-shed. Food was brought to them by believers, who guided them from place to place and provided shelter. At one point, about two years after the flight from Villemur, frightened by persecution, they returned to Montauban and 'put aside the sect of the heretics and ate meat and they were reconciled by the bishop of Carcassonne'. Although remaining in contact with the heretics, they did not resume the life of perfectae for eight years, when they entered a convent of female heretics at Linars and received the consolamentum once more, this time together with their mother.

Péronne eventually died in 1234, while they were hiding in a cabin in a wood - 'underground in a certain cell', says Arnaude's deposition - and there she was buried. Since the perfecti and perfectae invariably travelled in pairs, a new companion called Jordana was found for Arnaude de Lamothe, and she continued her itinerant life, but now staying more frequently in out-of-doors clandestine places rather than in the houses of believers, presumably because of the pressure being brought to bear by the Inquisition (active in the region since at least 1235). Once they appeared before the Inquisition at Linars where, presumably, they received some kind of penance, but whatever the sentence it remained unfulfilled, for they at once returned to the society of the Cathars. This existence was finally brought to an end when, in 1243, the two perfectae were captured while living in a tent in a wood

near Lanta. They were taken to Toulouse where they appeared before Friar Ferrier. [2]

The case of Arnaude de Lamothe suggests the importance of the early family environment in the making of a perfecta. The deposition of the elderly Hélis, the wife of Arnaud de Mazerolles, in 1243, shows the importance of women in the wider family links upon which Catharism depended. Hélis de Mazerolles told the inquisitors that she had been a Cathar believer since her youth. She had been brought up in the notorious heretical village of Fanjeaux, where her grandmother, Guillelme de Tonneins, her mother, Aude de Fanjeaux, and her sister, Braida, were all perfectae. In the 1190s her grandmother had openly held a house of female heretics at Fanjeaux, and Hélis recalled that when she was a girl she had visited the house many times and had been given bread, wine, nuts and fruit by her grandmother. Hélis remembered too that her sister-in-law, Fabrissa, had held a house of heretics at Montréal early in the century, before being forced to evacuate the castle in the face of the crusadors and take shelter at Gaja-la-Selve. [3] Montréal was one of the possessions of the lords of Laurac, another heretical family with whom Hélis de Mazerolles had close contact. Bernard Oth, the lord of Niort, testified in 1242, that more than forty years before, both his grandmother, Blanche de Laurac, and his aunt, Mabille, had been what he called 'garbed heretics', meaning perfectae, and for four or five years prior to adolescence he had been brought up by his grandmother. [4] His mother was another of Blanche's daughters, Esclarmonde, who had married Guillaume de Niort. Among Esclarmonde's brothers and sisters were Aimery de Montréal and Guiraude de Lavaur, both killed by the crusaders after the fall of Lavaur in 1211, and Navarre de Servian, who also became a perfecta. [5]

The families of Mazerolles, Laurac and Niort were part of a tightly-connected group, bound to each other by frequent marriages. For instance, Marquèse, an aunt of Hélis de Mazerolles, was married into the family of Mirepoix, which also made her the aunt of Alazais, the wife of a knight called Alzeu de Massabrac. Alazais was the sister of Raymond de Péreille, the lord of the famous Cathar stronghold at Montségur, and she testified before the Inquisition in 1244. When she was a child, Fournière, her mother, had secretly taken her away from Mirepoix, which was the castle of Guillaume-Roger, her father, to Lavelanet. In 1208, Fournière (with persumably complete control over her daughter) led her 'through her words and preaching to receive the consolamentum from the heretics'. Alazais led the life of a perfecta for three and a half years before leaving the sect and marrying Alzeu de Massabrac. Although this was apparently something of a rebellion against her mother's wishes, she remained a believer, and when in the early 1240s the royal seneschal, Humbert de Beaujeu, arrived in the south, she fled to Montségur. A year and a half later, in March 1244, the castle surrendered to the royal forces and she was captured. She admitted to the

inquisitors that two or three weeks before Montségur fell, while the castle was still under siege, she and other noble women there had made a pact that they would receive the consolamentum should they be near to death, even if they had lost the power of speech. [6]

These depositions show clearly that the Cathars gained many female recruits when they were relatively young. Indeed, some - such as Jeanne, the daughter of Isarn del Pas, of Barheiras - were little more than children. In her deposition of August 1244, she is described as 'a girl of fifteen years'. During the previous two years, together with her friend, Bonansias, who was herself later hereticated, she had stayed with female heretics in cabins in the woods, accompanying them when they gathered crops in the fields. She received the consolamentum and for a few weeks lived the nomadic life of a perfecta until, in late May 1244, she was captured and taken to Toulouse. [7]

Equally, however, there were other women who received the consolamentum at a more mature age, rather as many Catholic women entered nunneries in their later years. For example, in the early 1230s, Meline, châtelaine of the castle of Prades, received the consolamentum during an illness, presumably in anticipation of death, but she recovered, and for three or four years went to live with a group of female heretics in a number of cabins which she had had built in a wood. [8] Dias, the wife of Pons, coseigneur of Saint-Germier and Caraman, is a similar case. She was consoled by Bertrand Marty, the Cathar bishop of Toulouse, at Montségur in 1240. She lived in a cabin in a wood for a year, but was forced to flee, 'since some [persons] knew that this witness and other female heretics were in the aforesaid wood'. But this only delayed her capture, for soon after she was reported to the authorities, apparently by some children who had been looking after cattle and had seen her hiding in the wood. [9]

Finally, there is the case of perhaps the best known perfecta, Esclarmonde, the daughter of Roger-Bernard I, the Count of Foix, who has retrospectively become a heroine of the Cathar movement among some of its more romantic present-day supporters in Languedoc. Relatively little is known about her, except that after the death of her husband, Jourdain II de l'Isle, in 1204, she was hereticated in a ceremony at Fanjeaux, together with three other noble women, one of whom was Aude de Fanjeaux, mother of Hélis de Mazerolles, mentioned above. A large assembly of the local nobility was present, including the Count of Foix, her brother. [10] In the following years, Esclarmonde presided over a house of heretics at Pamiers where, according to Pierre des Vaux-de-Cerney, the highly partisan chronicler of the Albigensian Crusade, she worked with other women 'to seduce the hearts of the simple'. [11]

These and other examples give no indication that any distinction was made between the perfecti and the perfectae by the heretics who supported

them: a perfecta could provide the same spiritual services and was entitled to the same respect and support as a perfectus. Perfectae received the allegiance of believers in the greeting known as the melioramentum, which the Inquisition chose to call an 'adoration'. The believer genuflected before the perfect and received a blessing and a prayer that he or she would receive the consolamentum before death. There are frequent references to this ceremony in depositions concerning the perfectae, [12] and, less frequently, references to the preaching of perfectae [13] and to their ability to administer the consolamentum. [14]

The perfectae were also involved in more secular activities. The evidence of inquisitorial sentences and depositions strongly suggests that a rigid separation from the material elements of the world, which represented their ultimate goal, was not fully achieved by many of the perfect, male or female, and that the necessities of everyday life led them to participate in economic activity to an extent not entirely compatible with their professed views on the nature of evil. Perfectae either gave or sold a variety of goods to their supporters, including bread, fish, wine, clothing, bags, linen, cloth, shoes and wax. [15] They undoubtedly handled money, for they sometimes paid for food and accommodation provided for them and sometimes made monetary gifts or loans to believers. [16] In 1241, for instance, a Pierre Guitart was sentenced to go on a number of pilgrimages for receiving the very considerable sum of 100 solidi as a loan from a perfecta. [17] On a smaller scale, in 1243, Rubea, the wife of a Bernard de Ceteraiz from Minerve, received a loan from two perfectae of 6 solidi and 4 denarii tholosanis, for which she gave some linen cloth as security. The cloth was held for the perfectae by another believer. [18] It seems likely that the small communities of female heretics, so frequently mentioned in the depositions, maintained themselves by involvement in economic life, often as spinners and weavers. [19] Some perfectae seem also to have acquired medical knowledge, for a certain Pierre Etienne, sentenced in 1241, had 'consulted a female heretic many times for his illness', [20] while Arnaude de Lamothe treated believers for their ailments. [21]

It may perhaps have been a consequence of this close involvement with the community that produced a certain failure rate among the perfectae. Even the stoical Arnaude de Lamothe wavered in her devotion and left the ranks for eight years, while others made a more permanent break. In 1243, Berbeigueira (wife of Lobenx, a knight from Puylaurens) testified that her sister, Poma, had, before the time of the crusaders, left the sect of the heretics and returned to her husband and was with him for a long time. [22] According to the deposition of Saix de Montesquieu, also from Puylaurens, in 1243, his sister had been a perfecta and had stayed at his house for a year in 1217, but 'afterwards Bérengère put aside the sect of the heretics and was reconciled and received a husband'. [23] Barcelone, the wife of Guillaume

de Brugairolles from Villepinte, was brought up in a heretical family, in which her uncle was a perfectus and her family were believers. Her mother seems to have expected her sister, Teziada, to devote herself to the life of a perfecta but, although she held to the sect until about 1218, 'afterwards she was converted to the Catholic faith and received a husband'. [24] Bernarde Targuier, a perfecta for three and a half years, was a similar case; in the early 1220s she was reconciled by Fulk, the bishop of Toulouse, and was married, claiming in the deposition that 'afterwards she did not see heretics', except to reclaim a sum of money owed her by Bernarde de Lamothe. [25]

The prominence of women among the perfect was more than matched by their role among the believers, for female believers occupied a key position in the social and economic structure upon which Catharism was based. The career of Arnaude de Lamothe shows to what a high degree the Cathar perfecti were dependent upon the hospitality which the believers could provide. Both the inquisitorial sentences and the depositions offer numerous examples of the provision of accommodation, sometimes as a temporary hiding place, sometimes as a semi-permanent residence, for long periods. [26] Austorgue, the wife of Pierre de Resenguas, who lived in Toulouse, was typical of such believers. She had probably known and accepted the existence of the Cathars from her childhood; in her deposition she describes two female heretics in Toulouse as neighbours (vicinae). She was evidently accustomed to helping them when the need arose. One night in 1227, Asalmars, a perfecta whom she knew, left another perfecta, previously unknown to Austorgue, inside the gate of her house. Austorgue went out and found her and hid her for two days, even seeking out her companion and bringing her from another house in Toulouse, since the perfecta 'did not wish to eat without her companion'. The heretics were eventually taken to another hiding place by another believer. The network was evidently extensive, for Austorgue was told by Guillaume Salamon, a deacon of the heretics at Toulouse, of a certain female weaver in Toulouse, who would show her where heretics could stay, and, indeed, when Austorgue visited the weaver's house, she was taken through the building to another house in which a perfectus was hiding. [27]

Food and drink were also readily provided by the female believers: bread, fish (especially eels), vegetables (cabbages, lettuce and onions are particularly mentioned), grain, fruit, oil, cakes, wine and cider, are among items given. [28] When food was not donated, the heretics arranged for its purchase. A Raimonde Salinera said that she often sold her bread to certain female heretics, and that she had many times brought fish and other necessities for them, 'at their request and with their money'. [29] Clothing, bedding, linen, woollen thread, bags, dishes, and gifts of money (or in one case a pound of pepper, presumably to be used as currency) were among non-food

items donated or bequeathed by female believers.[30] Female believers provided essential support in other ways too: Bernarde Targuier lent money to Bernard de Lamothe, the bishop of the heretics, [31] Humberge Paline, 'received goods given to them', [32] Berbeignueira, the wife of Lobenx from Puylaurens, looked after items of value for the heretics, including a book, 60 solidi in money and a piece of wax, [33] Bérengère, the wife of Assalit de Monts, 'handed over the legacy of a certain perfected heretic to the heretics', [34] and Maria, the widow of a certain Hughes, went out to buy clothes in which a certain dead heretic was buried. [35] Although the task was more frequently done by men, some women were also responsible for acting as guides to heretics, taking them to safe houses in country in which they were unfamiliar, or giving them advice on where to stay. [36]

The acceptance of women in a position of equality among the spiritual elite of the Cathar Church was not, however, confined to female believers. Male believers helped perfecti and perfectae apparently without discrimination: one took two heretics to the leper colony at Cortinals and also delivered half a cart of chestnuts to a certain person, both actions being at the request of perfectae, [37] another sought food for perfectae, received them in his house, listened to their preaching and, in inquisitorial parlance,'adored' them; [38] another took his sister, a perfecta, from Toulouse to Montauban, found her and her companions shelter on a farm, paid 50 solidi for accommodation for them, and made his sister a tunic and a cap, [39] while a fourth man brought timber and repaired a cabin in which perfectae were living. [40]

These examples clearly show that the role of women in Catharism was active and central, both as perfectae and as believers. The foundation of a Catholic women's convent at Prouille, near Janjeaux, by St. Dominic in 1206, shows his recognition of the need for a counter-attraction for pious women in this region, as well as giving an indication of a contemporary's view of the extent of Cathar recruitment of women. The relative importance of women within the Cathar Church is more difficult to assess. By concentrating on examples of female participation in the heresy (as we have argued here) it would be easy to exaggerate their role. In fact, it is evident from the records which are extant that many more men than women were cited before the Inquisition, and that many more men than women were named by witnesses as being involved both as perfecti and credentes. Moreover, despite the admission of women to the Cathar ministry, there are no examples of women among the leaders of the sect, i.e., as bishops or deacons in the Cathar hierarchy. The nearest estimate which can be made at present is that about a third of the perfect were women, based upon the figures of Professor Duvernoy who has traced the names of 1,015 perfecti up to 1245, of whom 342 were women, [41] but these figures, even if they were complete, would be a very crude way of measuring relative importance.

Granted these reservations, the evidence shows female participation and support for the Cathar heresy on a large scale. The reasons are difficult to establish with complete certainty, but three distinct factors are worthy of consideration. These are: (i) the nature of Occitan society; (ii) the precocious development of the urban economy of Languedoc; (iii) the implications of Cathar belief itself.

Languedocian society in the first half of the thirteenth century displayed certain differences from that of northern France. By 1200 the north region had experienced the consolidation of a series of princely regimes which had subordinated the former allodial land-holders under their feudal control, a process which opened the way for the extension of monarchical power in the thirteenth century. A recognisable hierarchy was forming, based upon male primogeniture, reaching its theoretical apex in the person of the king, and sanctified by clerical support. The south presented a more diversified picture in which the word fief had a much less precise meaning than in the north, and where the allod was a far more common survival.[42] Primogeniture tended to be confined to the great comital families. The community of interest between the aristocracy and the upper clergy, which, despite their quarrels tended to characterise northern society, was to a great extent lacking. Although there does seem to have been an attempt to attach more positive obligations to the fief in Languedoc in the course of the twelfth century, it seems that the practical results of this were small, although the absence of modern local studies makes generalisation difficult. Dognon, writing in the 1880s, believed that in the early thirteenth century about half the lands remained allodial, and that the power of the Count of Toulouse rested not in military service owed, but in his large allodial estates.[43]

The typical southern nobility therefore tended to exist on divided lands or within a collective lordship, in which male and female heirs might hold jointly, and in which there was little loyalty to the Count of Toulouse, the nominal overlord. Because the connection between tenure and military service had not been effectively made, there was consequently a much weaker attachment to primogeniture and male inheritance; in the early middle ages the accession of a woman to all or some of the family property was not therefore uncommon. While the twelfth century pressures brought some changes in this, in that women were more often dowried in money than in land, and in that female inheritance was forbidden in some lordships except in default of male heirs,[44] nevertheless the role of women as land-holders remained important and consequently their social influence was considerable. In this kind of social structure it is not difficult to imagine the influence of the matriarchal figure, presiding over the co-heirs and maintaining a strong grip upon family ties and attitudes. An implicit recognition of the importance of this structure in southern society is contained in article 46 of the Statutes

of Pamiers, imposed upon Languedoc by the victorious Simon de Montfort in 1212, which forbade noble women to marry an indigenous person during a period of ten years without the consent of the count, a position which Montfort held de facto at that time. [45]

This southern aristocracy felt no community of interest with the local clergy. Petty seigneurs, confined to their share of the co-seigneury, found a display of anti-clericalism a convenient pretext for the usurpation of church lands, an attitude which perhaps reflected the policies of leaders like the Counts of Toulouse and the Counts of Foix. [46] Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay describes in detail the atrocities committed by Raymond-Roger, the Count of Foix, among which was a murderous attack upon the canons of St. Antonin of Pamiers, when they objected to the establishment of the count's aunt, a perfected heretic, as head of a Cathar house in the town. [47] While these attitudes can be exaggerated - the crusading tradition was strong in the south and the Military Orders were well-established there - nevertheless, it does seem that such a society presented no united authoritarian front to deviation and heresy. Catharism and Waldensianism flourished in the south, because the crust of repression, so much thicker and more uniform in the north, was thin and brittle in the south. According to another crusade chronicler, Guillaume de Puylaurens, the knights of Languedoc rarely vowed their children to the priesthood, apparently because they saw Catharism as a better alternative, more suited to their needs and attitudes. [48] Jordan of Saxony, the second master-general of the Dominican Order, maintained that the perfectae were assured of a steady supply of girls from the noble families of the Lauraguais 'by reason of poverty', a reference to the practice of holding through co-seigneurs. [49]

Catharism and the problem of the existence of evil was not peculiar to Languedoc; it was simply that this fundamental religious and philosophical problem was more able to find expression within the riven social structure of the south. Such a society gave women greater opportunities for self-expression, both through heresy and through the patronisation of the troubadours. Consequently, the habit of tolerating heresy became ingrained. Pons Magrefort, a knight of St.-Michel-de-Lanes, who appeared before the Inquisition in 1243, recalled that he had seen many heretics conducting themselves quite openly at Mas-Saintes-Puelles and Laurac and in many other castles and towns, because 'nobody was on their guard before the first arrival of the crusaders'. [50] Similarly, feudal and clerical theories concerning the divine ordering of society in which women were definitely subordinate, were less convincing in the southern environment. The fundamental difference in the attitude of the Catholic hierarchy and the perfectae is encapsulated in the famous rebuke delivered by Brother Etienne de Nîmes to Esclarmonde de Foix when she tried to make her own contribution to a

disputation between Cathars on one side and the bishop of Osma and Dominic Guzman on the other, held in Pamiers in 1207. She was brusquely told, 'Go Madame, tend your distaff, it does not appertain to you to speak in debates of this kind'. [51] The kind of social structure which existed in the south and the social attitudes which it engendered seem therefore to offer some explanation for the existence of heresy and the prominence of women in it.

The importance of the matriarchical figure has already been suggested: Arnaude de Lamothe, Hélis de Mazerolles, Bernard Oth of Niort, and Alazais de Massabrac, all recalled that either grandmothers or mothers or both had been hereticated. A closer look at one particular family shows the relationship between social structure, heresy and the position of women in less general terms. This is the family which held the Cathar stronghold of Montségur. Raymond de Péreille, the lord of the castle, had heard heretics preach since he was a boy and, in the early thirteenth century, had been persuaded by certain perfecti to rebuild the castle. Until its fall in 1244 Montségur was both a haven for refugees and a centre for worship, and many families from the surrounding region came there to stay. Raymond was married to Corba, the daughter of Marquèse de Lanta, a perfected heretic; in later years Corba herself received the consolamentum. The children of this marriage - Alpais, Philippa, Esclarmonde and Jourdain - were all believers. Alpais married Guillaume de Rabat from another heretical family, and Philippa married Pierre-Roger de Mirepoix, to whom Raymond granted the partial lordship of Montségur. Philippa testified that she, her mother and sisters had frequently eaten at the house of her grandmother, while Alpais remembered her grandmother's heretication by Bertrand Marty, later a Cathar bishop of Toulouse. [52] In such circumstances the importance of female influence within the family structure is hardly to be doubted.

The lords of Mirepoix into whom Philippa married are a good example of the kind of family which seems to be associated with heresy. Although the integrity of the lands was maintained and there was always a recognised head of the family, there were large numbers of co-seigneurs: 11 in 1159, 35 in 1207, and 14 in 1223, [53] among whom was Arnold-Roger, one of Raymond de Péreille's brothers, whose marriage connected them to two other heretical families, those of Montserver and Mas-Saintes-Puelles. The tightness of the structure is emphasised by the fact that Raymond de Péreille and Pierre-Roger were first cousins. Most of the nobility of the Lauraguais were interlinked in this way. Among others, there were joined the families of Mirepoix, Niort, Mazerolles, Fanjeaux, Laurac, Cabaret, Massabrac, Robat, Montserver and Mas-Saintes-Puelles, all of whom included important perfectae.

Equally, a social structure which permitted strong feminine influence also offers examples of determined women who were prepared to defy their families, either by joining the Cathars, or by refusing to participate in heretical practices. Berbeigueira, the wife of Lobenx de Puylaurens, testified in 1243 that she had been a believer for thirty years, yet when her husband was gravely ill in 1226, he refused the attentions of the perfecti, whom he ordered to be expelled from the house. [54] In the case of Bernard Faber de Caragodas the heretic was not his wife, but his daughter, Guillelme, who, against her father's wishes, had become a perfecta. In 1240, he arranged a meeting with her, taking with him a number of other persons sympathetic to heresy, whom he hoped might convince her to return home, but she did not wish to hear. Two other attempts to persuade her to change her mind also failed, for she said 'absolutely she would never do that'. [55] Feminine determination could also operate in the opposite direction. Faber de Podio Hermer said in 1243 that he had often inveighed against his wife, 'because she did not wish to esteem the heretics', [56] while Raymond de Miravel from Hautpoul saw, in 1228, when his father was dying 'that his mother absolved the said ill husband his heresy before he received the consolamentum from the heretics'. [57]

The second relevant factor concerns the relatively advanced urban development of Languedoc. The prevalence of heresy in the region has often been so ascribed for this was supposed to promote the free movement of traders and their goods, and with them, heretical ideas, possibly derived from the eastern lands in which the Manichaean heresy found its origins, and to which many western merchants travelled. There is certainly some truth in this explanation, for the most urbanised regions of western Christendom - apart from Languedoc, northern Italy, Flanders, Champagne, and the Rhineland - do seem to have been most prone to outbreaks of heresy, but perhaps it might be better to change the emphasis and suggest that the existence of the urban environment was more important in encouraging the appearance of ideas and beliefs already in existence, rather than simply as a means of importing ideas and beliefs from outside. Certainly the latter helped ignite the former, but dualism was latent in Languedoc in the first place. This may help to explain the prominence of women, for women played a proportionately greater part in the industry and commerce of most towns than they did in the militaristic society of the feudal nobility. Moreover, the major industry of the towns of Languedoc, that of textile manufacture, was by no means exclusive to men, as the examples cited above illustrate.

Research into the guild records of Toulouse shows that in the statutes on cloth-making of 1227, which are the earliest known for the city, women were admitted both as masters and as artisans, apparently on an equal basis with men, while spinning may well have been an exclusively feminine occupation. [58] Later guild records of the city, between 1279 and 1322, show that

five crafts specifically allowed the membership of women, but Sister Mulholland, who did the fundamental research on this, thinks that women 'shared in the industrial life of the city wherever the work of the craft was appropriate and possible' and that therefore other guilds must have admitted women too. [59] The legislation of 1227 clearly favours the dominus or domina of the crafts, for they controlled both the raw materials and the outlet for the finished products, so perhaps Catharism gave the artisans an opportunity to escape the economic subjugation which their work involved, enabling them to gather together in the houses so frequently mentioned in the depositions, rather like the beguinages which became increasingly common in northern Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Although beguinages in their northern manifestation were sometimes seen as bastions against heresy - Fulk, the bishop of Toulouse, was an enthusiastic supporter for this reason - it is clear that their adherence to the cult of virginity and voluntary poverty reflected aspirations similar to those of the Cathars and Waldensians of the Midi, and that they fulfilled similar religious needs for women, especially those from the urban classes. [60] On the other hand, the Toulouse statutes of 1227 do not create a monopoly, despite their bias in favour of the masters, for, theoretically at least, they allow freedom for any qualified person to enter the textile crafts, [61] thus offering no barrier to those who set themselves up in houses of the kind used by heretics and engaged in textile manufacture.

The third and final point concerns the nature of the Cathar religion itself. The Cathars believed that the way to salvation was to be found through the release of the soul from the material prison of the body, so that the soul might rejoin its guardian spirit. It followed logically that the Cathars should reject a society which they saw as being based upon materialism, including the Catholic Church, which, to quote one perfect, had instituted the mass 'for love of the great oblations', [62] and the feudal way of life which glorified warfare. Theoretically, each new body born into this environment represented another victory for Satan, another soul trapped in the material body. Matrimony and procreation were therefore to be condemned for perpetuating the lordship of Satan. Women believers sometimes expressed what they had heard about this in their depositions: one heard that matrimony and baptism were of no profit, [63] another that she could not make the greeting of the melioramentum while she was pregnant, [64] and a third that if she died pregnant she could not be saved. [65]

Catharism was then in theory subversive of the whole social order of medieval Christendom. The interpenetration of church and feudality which characterised the north, and which ensured the subordination of women, was rejected by Catharism for its materialist base. Aquinas's human family with its hierarchy of the wise ensuring good order was of no relevance if one

believed in a transmigration of souls in which the sex and social class of the bodies concerned were of no consequence. The weakness of the feudal hierarchy and the corruption of the Church in the south left a vacuum which could be filled by heretical ideas, and it is not difficult to see the attraction to women accustomed to being taught that they were by nature inferior, fit only to be pawns in the political chess-board of feudal land-holding and as slow-witted receptacles for the lord and master's male heir, an heir who would perpetuate the whole system. It would not be an exaggeration to interpret the attraction of Catharism for some women at least as an expression of discontent against masculine domination. While it would be facile to offer this as a general explanation for the prevalence of Catharism in the south, it would be equally wrong to dismiss the ideology of the heresy as being of no relevance to its adherents. The long, bitter persecution of Catharism by the Catholic Church needs to be seen in the light of the threat it seemed to present to the social order, a threat clearly recognised by the Catholic Church. The extremity of the measures reflects the extremity of the threat. On the other side of the coin, it would be stretching credibility indeed to deny that at least some of the Cathars, including women, recognised their religion as a means of escaping the established order of things, an order which they saw as essentially a Satanic creation.

These explanations are partial and tentative. It is evident that the reasons which led people to become followers of the Cathar religion are often complex and contradictory. One woman may have become a perfecta because her family expected it of her, while another may have taken up this way of life as a form of rebellion against the family as an institution. To take the third point concerning the nature of the Cathar religion: it is clear that the theoretical views of the Cathars did not always accord with the compromises forced upon them by daily life. Although the perfecti and perfectae were widely admired for their way of life - even Catholic writers give grudging recognition of this - some of the evidence already cited indicates that they did not always adhere to the strict rules of poverty, while the apparent double-standards of many of the believers have often been the subject of discussion and attack. In the same way, despite the strictures on matrimony, it was the family structure of Languedoc which provided Catharism with its most trustworthy foundation. Moreover, it cannot be relied upon that all the supporters of Catharism rigorously examined the full implications of their religion or indeed were even interested in doing so. If there is any truth in the assertion that Christianity was not fully absorbed by all its adherents, then equal doubts can be expressed about Catharism given the wide range of support which it attracted in Languedoc. Market-place gossip sometimes surfaces in the depositions, and leds support to the idea of incomprehension and superstition. [66]

Generalisation is therefore hazardous; the explanations for the evident connection between women and Catharism may be as varied as the women who were attracted by the heresy. On balance, however, it seems safer to give more weight to the nature of the medieval social and legal structure of Languedoc in encouraging the prominence of women in heresy, rather than to the social implications of Cathar belief as such.

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NOTES

1. Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Doat, vol.23, f.98-99.
2. ibid., 23, f.3-50.
3. ibid., 23, f.162-180.
4. ibid., 24, f.83v-84v. See also Wakefield, W.L., 'The Family of Niort in the Albigensian Crusade and before the Inquisition,' in Names. The Journal of the American Name Society, 18, 1970.
5. See Roquebert, M., L'Epopée Cathare, 1198-1212: l'invasion, Toulouse, 1970, p.114, for this family.
6. Doat, op.cit., 24, f.204-207v.
7. ibid., 23, f.274-291v.
8. ibid., 23, f.127-127v.
9. ibid., 23, f.57v-62v.
10. Devic, C. and Vaissete, J., Histoire Générale de Languedoc, vol.8, Toulouse, 1879, no.373, pp.1150-1151; see Vidal, J.-M., 'Esclarmonde de Foix dans l'histoire et le roman,' in Revue de Gasgogne, 11, 1911.
11. Vaux-de-Cernay, Pierre des Histoire Albigeoise, ed. and trans. Guébin, P. and Maisonneuve, H., Paris, 1951, p.82.
12. E.g., Doat, op.cit., 21, f.205v-206; 22, f.2v, 263v; 23, f.8-9, 11, 17-17v, 20-21v, 34-35, 47v-48, 59, 182, 239v, 277.
13. E.g., ibid., 21, f.230v-231; 23, f.10.
14. E.g., ibid., 23, f.234v, 300.
15. ibid., 21, f.230v-231, 259; 23, f.182v-182 bis, 237v, 259-259v.
16. E.g., ibid., 21, f.231, 266v-267, 289-289v.
17. ibid., 21, f.239.
18. ibid., 23, f.183v-184v.
19. E.g., Bigordana, a believer, was sentenced to go on pilgrimage in 1241, for, among other things, providing two female heretics with thread (filum), from which they made head-bands (vittae), ibid., 21, f.311v. See also Duvernoy, J., 'Les Albigeois dans la vie sociale et économique de leur temps,' in Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes occitanes, Actes du colloque de Toulouse, années 1962-3, Toulouse, 1964, pp.67-8.

20. Doat, op.cit., 21, f.297v-298.

21. ibid., 23, f.46v-47, 72-72v.

22. ibid., 24, f.136.

23. ibid., 24, f.126-126v.

24. ibid., 23, f.121-4.

25. ibid., 22, f.2v.

26. E.g., ibid., 21, f.189v, 200v-201, 201v, 213-213v, 307-307v, 312-312v; 23, f.33-33v, 250, 254, 309v-310v.

27. ibid., 24, f.1v-7v. Austorgue was eventually sentenced to perpetual prison (Toulouse, 17 March 1245), Guiraud, J., Histoire de l'Inquisition au Moyen Age, vol.2, Paris, 1938, p.146, appendix to ch. 5.

28. E.g., ibid., 21, f.190v, 213-213v, 216, 217-217v, 271, 293, 300, 301, 306v, 307-307v, 311v; 22, f.57v; 23, f.182-182v, 246v-247, 259-259v; 24, f.1v-7v, 140-140v, 199v-200; Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'Inquisition dans le Languedoc, ed. A. Douais, vol.2, Paris, 1900, nos.X-XIV, pp.252-7.

29. Doat, op.cit., 21, f.240-240v.

30. ibid., 21, f.190v, 216, 290-290v, 293, 301, 303, 306, 307-307v, 311v; 23, f.46v-47, 170v, 173, 182v, 300v; 24, f.1v, 140-140v.

31. ibid., 22, f.2v.

32. ibid., 21, f.213-213v.

33. ibid., 24, f.140-140v.

34. Douais, op.cit., vol.2, no.XVIII, p.44; she received a sentence of perpetual prison (18 August 1247), Guiraud, op.cit., p.148.

35. Douais, op.cit., vol.2, p.45.

36. E.g., Doat, op.cit., 21, f.209v-210, 216, 303; 23, f.49-49v.

37. ibid., 21, f.266v-267.

38. ibid., 21, f.205v-206.

39. ibid., 21, f.242-3.

40. ibid., 23, f.62.

41. Duvernoy, 'La Liturgie et l'église cathares,' in Cahiers d'Etudes Cathares, 18, 1967, p.25.

42. See, for instance, Dossat, Y., 'La Société méridionale à la veille de la croisade albigeoise,' in Revue du Languedoc, 1944.

43. Dognon, P., Les Institutions Politiques et Administratives du Pays de Languedoc du XIIIe siècle aux guerres de religion, Toulouse, 1888, pp.16-19.

44. Molinier, A., 'Etude sur l'administration féodale dans le Languedoc,' in HGL, vol.7, Toulouse, 1879, pp.152-4.

45. Timbal, P., Un Conflit d'Annexion au Moyen Age. L'Application de la Coutume de Paris au pays d'Albigeois, Toulouse, 1950, p.183 (text of the statutes).

46. See Dossat, 'Le Clergé méridional de la veille de la croisade albigeoise,' in Revue du Languedoc, 1944, pp.276-8.

47. Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay, op.cit., p.82.

48. Guillaume de Puylaurens, Historia Albigensium in RHG, vol.XIX, Prologue.

49. Jordan of Saxony, in Acta Sanctorum, vol.35, Paris and Rome, 1867, col.544.

50. Doat, op.cit., 23, f.86v.

51. Guillaume de Puylaurens, op.cit., c.VIII, p.200.

52. Doat, op.cit., 22, f.201-214, 259-264; 24, f.198-202.

53. Pasquier, F., Cartulaire de Mirepoix, Paris, 1921, vol.1, introd., p.15, and pièces just, no.IV, pp.24-6; vol.2, no.I, pp.1-6.

54. Doat, op.cit., 24, f.143, 140v.

55. ibid., 23, f.67-69.

56. ibid., 22, f.5.

57. ibid., 23, f.235. See also similar but more suspect cases, 23, f.96, and 24, f.10-10v. Both these cases may have been an attempt to minimise involvement in heresy before the inquisitors.

58. Mulholland, M., 'Statutes on Clothmaking, Toulouse, 1227,' in Essays in Medieval Life and Thought presented in honour of A.P. Evans, ed. J.H. Mundy, New York, 1955, arts. IV and II, p.173.

59. Mulholland, Early Gild Records of Toulouse, New York, 1941, p.xxiv.

60. See especially McDonnell, E.W., The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, New York, 1969, pp.3-7, 436.

61. Mulholland, 'Statutes', op.cit., e.g. art. XII, p.175.

62. Doat, op.cit., 22, f.31v.

63. ibid., 22, f.65v-66.

64. ibid., 21, f.296-296v.

65. ibid., 22, f.57.

66. ibid., 22, f.32. See also, for example, 22, f.26-26v.